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Associativism and Transnational Practices on Capeverdean Migrants

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Abstract

We propose a reflection on the role that the Capeverdean immigrant associations have towards the intensification of transnational practices in the Capeverdean community. We consider that transnationalism as a characteristic per excellence of the contemporary Capeverdean migration creates a change in the goal set by associations which are traditionally involved either by defending the origin of the identity or by social inclusion from the place of destiny.

In the area of studies conducted on Capeverdean transnationalism interest has been raised especially towards the intensification of emigrants' connections with their origins. Malheiros, for instance, points out that the constant "coming and going" that characterizes transnationalism becomes more intense starting from Lisbon and Rotterdam which are the most important starting points of this circulatory movement followed by the United States of America, particularly Boston. (Malheiros, 2001). However, more recent studies have been pointing to transnational spaces connecting different cores of the Capeverdean Diaspora between themselves. On this essay, we refer to the people's mobility between European countries among the Schengen space whose intensity is considered secondary but which indicates that the relational frame within the transnational space evolves into more complex forms of contact and interaction. Immigrants have been circulating for economic and relational reasons not just from Lisbon and Rotterdam but also from countries like France, Belgium, Switzerland, Luxembourg, Spain and Italy. Undoubtedly the practices and social interactions they experience in that space have to be supported by individual and collective strategies. Therefore associativism is brought to the consideration of a "transnational community" and its functions regarding Capeverdean s' new reemigrations and the time variable circulatory movement between cores of the Diaspora should be acknowledged. The intervenients are especially low middle class and the conducted study demonstrates that informal networks of mutual solidarity and help made up of family members and friends endorse their circulatory movement and permanencies. They don't refer the resort to more institutionalized or organized structures like immigrant associations, therefore the analysis on associativism and the transnational space should derive from the practices and needs referred by the transnational immigrants. Regarding in particular help and solidarity strategies these involve those stationed in a country and helping to allow the arrival of others by previously securing employment (or contacts for such) and housing. They also support those immigrants who circulate in the translational space conducting an informal commerce buying and selling products in the Diaspora's different cores. We came to realize that this mobility is based on the migratory knowledge accumulated in the long Capeverdean migration history and that favours appropriate decisions regarding destinies, the evaluation of the permanency conditions and the identification of weak and strong points of each place according to the immigrant's needs.

The intensification of this new type of circulatory movement creates an interest around the nature of practices and needs experienced in that transnational space individually (like the above described immigrants), or collectively organized as is the case with transnational associativism practiced by the Congresso dos Quadros Cabo-verdianos da Diáspora, which

since its first edition in 1994 holds a meeting every four years. Individual mobility is justified by the search for better employment as well as taking advantage of seasonal offers in different locations (for example, the hotel industry in the Summer or agriculture in harvest time) or taking advantage of the economic changes of a specific country, creating workstations in areas like the food industry or building construction. Equally important are family motives like, for example, the case of an immigrant woman who moved temporarily from Luxembourg to Portugal after realizing that it would be easier to guarantee from Lisbon the emigration of a close family member based in Cape Vert. Legalization motives also justify this circulatory movement and presently Portugal is identified as the most likely country to obtain legal documentation required for the Schengen space acting as the jumping-board to a new start in the case of immigrants who are not able to legalize their situation in the country where they immigrated to in the first place. Therefore, these movements have also a reply (and resistive) character to them against the classification and hierarchical systems applied to immigrants and foreigners in different locations, in the sense that temporary permanencies are used to escape the demands of legal systems. Switzerland and Luxembourg, for example, are considered very strict countries in what concerns illegal work permits and which are very vigilant of companies. In that way, immigrants choose these countries especially for their seasonal activities of agriculture or in the hotel industry, according to the time of year, for example.

The high relational density of the immigrants collective also favours mobility, so to the traditional claim *each Capoverdian based in Cape Vert has a relative or friend away* is added the confirmation that *every Capeverdean immigrant knows a fellow Capevertian immigrant in another country*.

We came to the conclusion that the profile of these transnational immigrants' is of young people or young adults with a strong female incidence especially among those in charge of small business done conducted between different cores of the Diaspora usually by ground, supplying communities in the main immigration centres with beauty products for Africans acquired in Paris, for example, or the latest music records produced in the United States of America or Holland. The female immigrants ensure in fact the satisfaction of very specific personal preferences by reselling Thai rice, for instance, or women's clothes from Chinese stores in France, which according to a female shopper in Lisbon "are different and better than the ones you find in supermarkets, or Chinese stores in Portugal". But it is transnational immigrants who ensure the distribution of such products in secondary cores like Switzerland, Belgium, Luxembourg, Spain and Italy in their attempts to find employment in such locations or when visiting relatives and friends. Frequently enough the circulatory movement is done by

ground, by train or bus allowing for the transport of more luggage. Less referred is the fear of a tighter vigilance in airports.

In these new mobilities other types of violence and exploitations are not less radical than the characteristics of immigration. They are experienced in the same way because: immigrants travel illegally between countries; they get temporarily settled isolating themselves from processes which in the long run favour the adjustment to localizations; they are subject to the instability of verbal promises made regarding a specific job or they get involved in illicit business networks which also concern other small transnational immigrants connected to their own ethnical networks.

While the traditional immigrant may count on the support of immigrant associations in their efforts to adjust particularly in the main immigration centres, the new immigrants construct an original social place strange to the eyes of the “legitimate natives”, which as Tarrius claims allows for the transnational immigrants to get to better know the cities residents, boundaries, territories and rules (Tarrius, 2001). This happens because it is demanded from immigrants to negotiate their way into any location according to the different characteristics and “pre-requisites” they have to acknowledge in each country. The new mobilities are also challenging since they are in the service of the birth of new cosmopolitan worlds, being that when immigrants cross borders they also come cross immigrants from other origins.

Therefore, in these circulatory territories small transnational immigrants establish intermediate social spaces where an intermediate social ethic is also present and which not only interferes with the socializing quality of transnational spaces but also has the potential to change expectations immigrants have on social spaces of immigration fixating centres of insertion societies. This means changes also include the assignment of traditional immigration spaces in the processes of identity (re)construction and building and strengthening of the collective strategies conceived to ensure settling and adapting.

These new ways of mobility and occupation of the transnational space demand a social and relational competence and denounce collective competences and strategies different from the ones associations have been adopting in immigration. A summary of the associativism’s assignments in the Diaspora recognizes as main tasks culture and Capeverdean identity preservation as well as the support of a well successful adjustment to the destination of all the Capeverdean natives or of specific subgroups of women, young people, professionals or residents in specific neighbourhoods. Another task connected with the intensification of transnational practices is to contribute to the development in country of origin. However, in

what regards the performance of immigrant association the main concern is with the availability to intervene with governments, municipality representations, private financiers, i. e., formal intervenients which coincides with the increasingly higher demands from the latter for a more structured intervention adjusted to an ethical based associativism (Malheiros, 2001). In this scenario, associations' efforts towards the formalization and creation of professionalizing trajectories are highlighted. Guidance towards a more rational performance with social intervention activities (slums, young peoples, children, women) and a more political and directed conduct towards social support clashes with the weakening of the centrality traditional activities based on the culture of origin, social activities and recreation (football, typical Capeverdean parties, etc.). It also contrasts with the highlight of collective strategies of a more informal character experienced in the transnational space. However, it is seen as an advantage for the survival and strengthening of populations they represent and the power invested in them.

CONCLUSION

We reached the conclusion that transnational immigrants are not yet identified in their specific needs by associative organizations. However, studies have demonstrated that like transnational collective strategies such as the Congresso de Quadros Cabo-verdianos da Diáspora for example, transnational practices of the small immigrant supported by informal networks of a more spontaneous character are also an important sign of the passing of a Diaspora to a transnational community allowing to identify the practice of an active migratory culture and the appeal to an accumulated migratory knowledge which aids the implementation of intense and frequent types of circulation and contact amongst the different Diaspora cores.

Transnationals practices of young people and young adults of low middle class less referred to and specified guide us to a more cosmopolitan identity characteristic of a Diaspora; the daily Exchange between social actors demands a constant guidance regarding localizations and the crossing of spaces favours trying new patterns and experiencing space and contact, consequently new ways of cosmopolitanism and unity. Such practices have implications in the adjustment processes in immigration, in the ways they adapt themselves, in the creation of collective strategies of construction more or less structured and in the facing of the immigrant reality like in associativism, especially if we consider the maturing process of immigration of associations far more oriented to the certification as intervenients in the formal institutions as

opposed to the temporary character of these transnational immigrants' permanency in localizations where they don't clash with the institutionalized systems like in the case of permanent immigrant presence.

Like the active groups in the transnational space, like the elite that uses Internet or the cultural producers that place themselves on a privileged interface between origin and destination and between the different cores of the Diaspora, low middle classes demonstrate specific interests and different notions in what they consider an important item in the definition of the Capeverdean migration. The collective strategies in benefit of this group may direct themselves on a lesser scale to the traditional issues which occupy immigration associations as: the definition and defence of the Capevertian presence; the participation in the development of Cape Vert, the representation within the Diaspora, the recognition of official power in each immigrated country and full citizenship for the immigrants who are not immigrants (the so called "second generation") and the elderly. The characterization of practices in the transnational space of these immigrants allows us to suppose that the capability to guarantee dominance over specific transnational commercial spaces or over the work market is a guarantee of associations' representation with those members. Or also of the rights to a globalized citizenship according to Simmel so much more consistent with a type of social occupation of space that turns mobility into a way of life as legitimate as sedentary habits in the eyes of the world.

Transnational practices are important especially because the transnacionalism that prevents investment and the involvement in the destiny becomes an obstacle, as Faist sustains. In order for it to be a long-term benefit it needs to lead to the development of political and cultural performance that doesn't only report back to exchanges with the country of origin. We may also add that it shouldn't be limited to an ideally desired adjustment pattern for immigrants coming from poor countries and from emigration countries as Cape Vert.

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